



# GET READY FOR TAX TIME

April 15 seems a long way off, but it's not too early to get ready for income tax day. In fact, the sooner you get your taxes done the less time you have to spend worrying about them! Here are some tips you can use to make filing this year's federal and state returns less stressful and time-consuming:

## START BY GATHERING THE ESSENTIALS.

You should have your W2, 1099s, interest and dividend statements and anything else that documents your taxable income for the year. If you're itemizing instead of taking the standard deduction, you'll need receipts for business expenses, acknowledgements of charitable contributions, mortgage payments and other proof of expenditures that reduce your taxes. Pull out last year's return and review it.

## DECIDE WHO WILL PREPARE YOUR RETURN.

If you decide to hire someone, make sure you choose wisely. When the tax preparer makes a mistake, you're the one who's held accountable. Ask about the person's credentials and area of expertise. If you want a preparer who can stand in for you if there's a problem with the Internal Revenue Service, it will be a certified public accountant, a tax attorney or an enrolled agent. An enrolled agent is certified and licensed by the federal government to practice before the IRS. Ask friends and relatives if they've used a preparer they would recommend. Your EAP can refer you to a tax preparer and even get you a discount on the fee.

If you're doing your own return, make sure you understand the basics, such as which filing status is appropriate and advantageous for you, what has to be reported as income and what qualifies as a deduction. Using tax preparation software such as Turbo Tax or TaxCut can make things easier.

## HOW SHOULD YOU FILE YOUR RETURN?

The IRS is pushing electronic filing over paper returns, and it's becoming more and more popular. Last year, 80 million returns were filed electronically. It's easier on the IRS and speeds refunds. You can file electronically on your home computer. Paid preparers will do it. Some taxpayers qualify for the IRS's Free File program and can go online to use commercial tax preparation software and file electronically – for free.

## AND IF YOU JUST CAN'T GET IT DONE IN TIME . . .

You can file for a six-month extension that gives you until October 15 to file your return. However, you have to file for the extension by April 15, and if you owe the IRS money, they'll charge you interest until you pay up.

In addition to contacting your EAP, you can get advice on preparing your tax returns or find a professional preparer at these web sites.

- » Check with the IRS for answers to frequently asked questions, tips on tax preparation, updates on changes that affect your return and more at [www.irs.gov](http://www.irs.gov).
- » If you're looking for a certified public accountant in your area, the American Institute of Certified Public Accountants can help at <http://www.aicpa.org/>.
- » You can find an enrolled agent through the National Association of Enrolled Agents at [www.naea.org/](http://www.naea.org/).
- » The American Bar Association provides resources for finding a lawyer – including a tax attorney – at <http://www.abanet.org/lawinfo/find1.html>.

*This article is for informational and self-help purposes only. It should not be treated as a substitute for financial, medical, psychiatric, psychological or behavioral healthcare advice, nor as a substitute for consultation with a qualified professional.*

**Do you need help with tax preparation or other personal financial matters?  
Call your EAP!**

Your Employee Assistance Program can help with these and other problems you may face.  
You can ask about:

- » Financial Services
- » Legal Services
- » Childcare and Eldercare Assistance
- » Identity Theft Recovery Services
- » Daily Living Issues

Call *any time* for a telephonic consultation.

**For more information, call  
(866) EAP-4SOC  
(866) 327-4762**

TDD callers, please dial (800) 327-0801

**Or visit us online at:  
[www.eap4soc.mhn.com](http://www.eap4soc.mhn.com)  
(register with the access code "SOC")**